



LTG Joseph L. Yakovac Jr. Reflects on Army Acquisition Changes and Accomplishments

Cynthia D. Hermes

On Sept. 1, 2006, LTG Joseph L. Yakovac Jr., Military Deputy (MILDEP) to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology (ASAALT) and Director, Acquisition Career Management, took time out of his busy schedule to speak with *Army AL&T* Magazine and reflect on the many changes and accomplishments the AL&T Workforce has seen in the three years that he's been MILDEP.

LTG Yakovac stressed that one of the Army Acquisition Corps' greatest challenges for the 21st century is integrating complex solutions across the battlespace and providing synergy across all capabilities for the combatant commanders and the Soldiers we support. (Photo by Karen Sas, U.S. Army TACOM Life Cycle Management Command.)

AL&T: After three years as the MILDEP, what legacy do you feel you've left the Army Acquisition Corps and Army AL&T Workforce?

Yakovac: I've been working in Army acquisition for a long time and there were times that I said if I ever got to the top of the organization, there were some things that I'd like to improve. I felt that we could improve our relationships with other organizations that we partner with to do business.

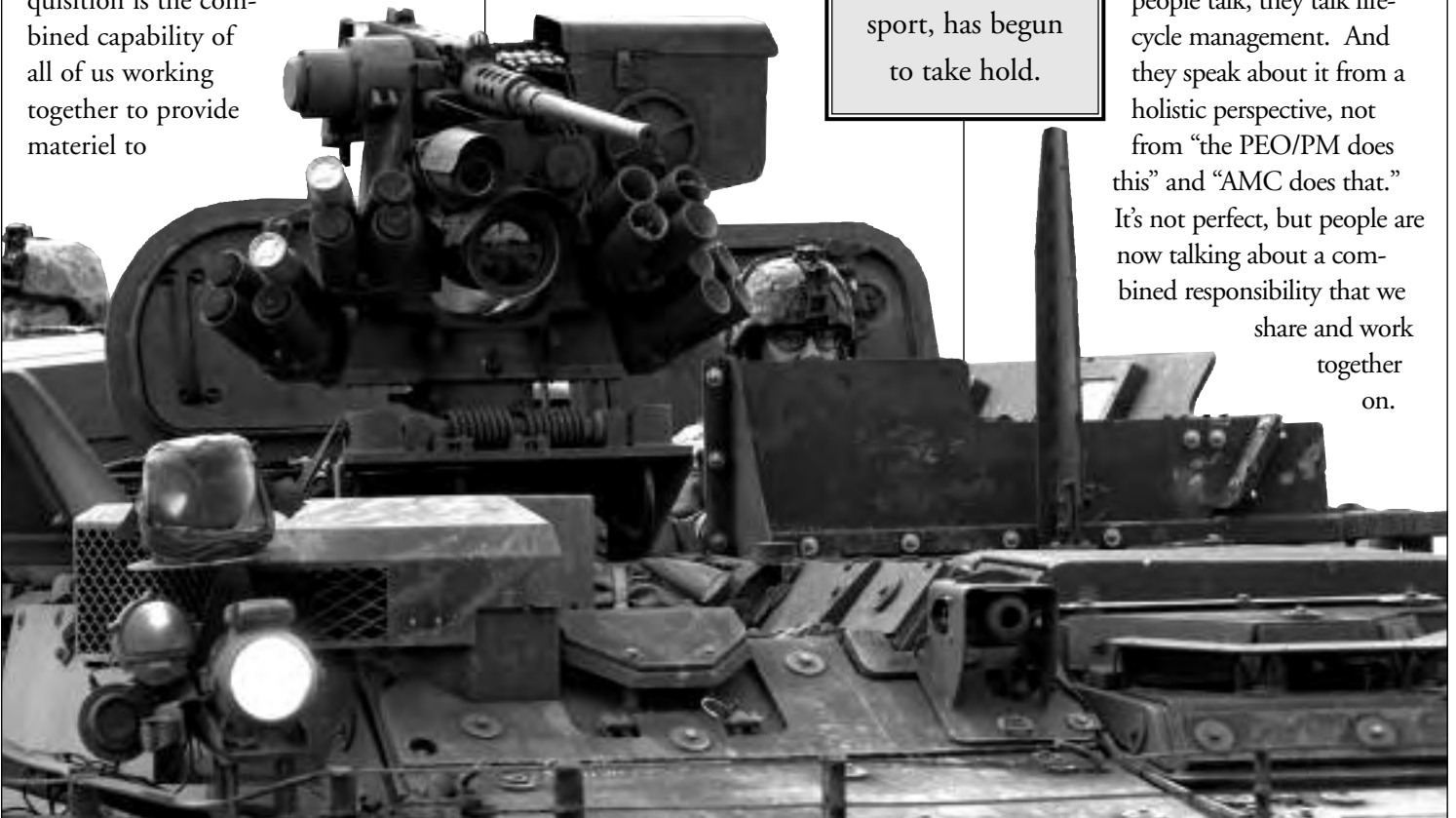
The first thing that always frustrated me was the question of who is the life-cycle manager for the equipment we field. It always came down to whether it was the program executive officer [PEO]; program, project or product manager [PM]; or U.S. Army Materiel Command [AMC]. In fact, if the system and the resource authorities are laid out side-by-side, it becomes real clear to everybody that acquisition is the combined capability of all of us working together to provide materiel to

Soldiers, and then maintaining and sustaining that equipment once it's fielded. So I always thought that the right question to ask wasn't "who" the life-cycle manager was, but "how" we together — AMC and the PEO community — provide materiel throughout its life cycle. In fact, there's no line between the two organizations from the beginning of a concept for a piece of equipment through its retirement. AMC and the PEO community must work together. One of the things that I really wanted to accomplish during my tenure was bringing together this whole concept of life-cycle

From my perspective, we've come a long way and I think everybody is beginning to understand why this is the way we should be doing business. Even outside of our organization — from the Army staff and people in the field — this whole life-cycle management concept, which is really a team sport, has begun to take hold.

management under the Life Cycle Management Commands [LCMCs]. That was one of the first things we implemented within about 8 months of my receiving Secretary Claude M. Bolton's [Army Acquisition Executive] and former AMC Commanding General GEN Paul J. Kern's guidance.

Since then, we have made great progress in working better together in ways that our Soldiers, Sailors and Marines — or anybody we provide equipment to — will benefit from. That was the first thing that I really wanted to accomplish. Now, after three years, is it perfect? No. But as you walk around and listen to people talk, they talk life-cycle management. And they speak about it from a holistic perspective, not from "the PEO/PM does this" and "AMC does that." It's not perfect, but people are now talking about a combined responsibility that we share and work together on.



"In spite of all of the roadblocks the acquisition system puts in front of us, we do a damn good job of providing capability," Yakovac reflected. Here, SSG William Black from the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team puts that capability to work during a recent combat patrol in his Stryker vehicle near Mosul, Iraq. (U.S. Air Force (USAF) photo by TSGT John M. Foster, 1st Combat Camera Squadron.)



Yakovac stressed that life-cycle management will help the acquisition community integrate technologies and capabilities to better address combatant commanders' battlefield requirements. Here, 1st Armored Division Soldiers maneuver their M2A3 Bradley Fighting Vehicle through the streets of Tal Afar, Iraq, during a combat patrol. (USAF photo by SSGT Aaron Allmon, 1st Combat Camera Squadron.)

As a result of this progress, there are other things that get done differently now, including how the ASAALT staff interfaces and works with AMC's staff. From my perspective, we've come a long way and I think everybody is beginning to understand why this is the way we should be doing business. Even outside of our organization — from the Army staff and people in the field — this whole life-cycle management concept, which is really a team sport, has begun to take hold.

Other things have happened along the way to enable life-cycle management to succeed. As we worked with AMC and reviewed lessons learned from the global war on terrorism [GWOT], we recognized the need to have an organization, an actual unit, to be our face to

the field. Working with AMC, we developed the Theater Support Command concept and the Army Field Support Brigades [AFSBs] as modular and highly tailorable organizations with AL&T requirements embedded within them. So we now have units that actually live side-by-side with Soldiers — in peacetime and in war — to carry out all AL&T functions. I think that the philosophy of life-cycle management through organizational construct helps support Soldiers and, from my perspective, I'm pretty happy with where we are, but know that we have a lot of work to do to fulfill all of our combatant commanders' battlefield requirements.

The second thing I wanted to tackle was the challenge of 21st-century

product and project management, which is really a lot harder when you start thinking about what we're required to do in terms of integrating battlespace equipment. We needed a group of professionals — both military and civilian — to do this. I was fairly satisfied with the military system we put in place, and I'll talk about that later. But I really felt that the area where we really weren't doing enough was in convincing a small group of our civilians who really wanted to step up to the plate and become leaders within the civilian workforce. We needed to put some things in place that would allow them to see that, in terms of the path that they took, they could become PMs. We also hoped to begin to build for the future our next civilian workforce leaders and PEOs. We

worked a lot with the U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center [USAASC] at Fort Belvoir, VA, to look for ways that we could improve opportunities for the civilian workforce to become PMs. I think we've done a lot of things in the last three years, including recoding most product and project management jobs as best qualified. In other words, military and civilian personnel could both compete for the same positions. When I came to this job, we had some of that, but we still had too many positions I thought were coded "military only." We opened many new positions up and changed how we allow people to compete. We did away with the idea that to be a PM, you had to proclaim you were mobile. We tried to allow people to compete and then prioritize if they wanted to stay within the area where

they currently live so they wouldn't have to move. So this strengthening of building leaders on the civilian side is something that I wanted to do. Again, it's not exactly where it should be, but I think we've put some things in place that better allow that to happen over time as we redefine our corporate culture.

If I'm not mistaken, at the last board we held, we had more civilians compete than we've had in previous boards. This is an indication that the changes we put in place are beginning to show civilians that there is a way they can compete with the military. We have more civilian PEOs than we've ever had at any time in our history. And we're showing that, at the top, you must be able to manage your military leaders (general officers) and

civilian leaders (senior executive service members) as a leadership entity, not as "military do this" and "civilians do that." Everyone must be managed and our senior leaders must have confidence that civilians can do the job if given the opportunity. I think that Edward Bair [PEO Intelligence, Electronic Warfare and Sensors], Kevin Fahey [PEO Ground Combat Systems], Paul Bogosian [PEO Aviation], Jim Blake [PEO Simulation, Training and Instrumentation] and Kevin Carroll [PEO Enterprise Information Systems] have all proven that, given an opportunity, they have the capability. The challenge now is to grow the next generation of leaders.

As I said earlier, on the military side, I thought we had some issues with the types of jobs we were giving to our

For decades the M1A2 Abrams main battle tank has provided the Army with the requisite mobility, firepower, lethality and battlefield survivability. Yakovac emphasized the importance of maximizing the capabilities of our weapon systems over their entire life cycles. Here, 1st Armored Division Soldiers provide route security from their Abrams tank near Tal Afar, Iraq, on May 17, 2006. (USAF photo by SSGT Jacob N. Bailey, 1st Combat Camera Squadron.)





Yakovac drives home the importance of training, education, developmental assignments and mentoring for the future professional development of the AL&T Workforce during a "Meet the MILDEP" presentation at the TACOM LCMC, Warren, MI. (Photo by Karen Sas, U.S. Army TACOM LCMC.)

military. In other words, there were a lot of jobs I felt had been carried over from an earlier era when people or organizations wrote job descriptions for military, but never really thought about what that job position would mean — not only for the individuals in terms of their personal growth but also for their competitiveness for promotions down the road against their Army peers. One of the early things we decided was to review every job and every military position within the acquisition community. We spent a week with the folks from USAASC and other organizations in really reading through each description and asking ourselves were these jobs that we would want young officers to have and were they going to give those individuals the skill sets that they needed to be competitive later on in their careers. If

not, then we should do away with some of these outdated position descriptions. So we scrubbed the positions and, as a result, a lot of them were eliminated or moved elsewhere. The opened space was used to get other requirements that were better for the military in terms of personal growth and providing jobs that were really challenging. Again, it's not perfect, but we've made a major move to ensure that job descriptions stay current and our military officers are competitive.

I also felt that we did not have enough military within the PEO and PM shops, so we have restructured and taken slots from other organizations and moved them to where I believe they are most needed. That's not an easy change to implement and it's

going to take some time to occur, but we think we're on the right track in better aligning our military personnel to jobs that will give them the tools that they need. And, from an organizational standpoint, we're putting people where we really need them community-wide.

We had a big issue when I first came in regarding this whole new world of contingency contracting and contingency contracting officers. We weren't prepared for what we needed to do and, basically, for the first year or two in Iraq and Afghanistan, we worked on a "hey, let's get some people out there to do the job" basis. First we had to really think through how to provide contingency contracting in a constantly changing, always fluid and frequently dangerous environment, and

GWOT's ever-changing requirements. Within the AFSB, we now have contracting battalions commanded by an acquisition lieutenant colonel with, primarily, majors below him. And for the first time, the Army gave us a small number of noncommissioned officers [NCOs] to be contingency contracting NCOs, where, again, they will be able to train their unit with those paths that are required to deploy to perform contingency contracting missions. Contingency contracting operations are now part of how we do business.

The final thing, from my perspective at least, is the way we assigned officers. In some cases, their first assignment — not their ability — would either make or break their career. We had assignments for officers that I felt would not give them a good foundation. Now, granted, some of those assignments have to be filled because they are still necessary to the way we do business. For example, there are a lot of jobs at the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. But officers spending four years in one of those jobs will not be competitive in the long term. So we discussed some ideas with the personnel at USAASC and HRC [Human Resources Command] and came up with a new methodology for assigning officers. To give each officer as broad a base as possible on the road to becoming a PM, we decided to move them out in only two years. This idea grew into the regionalization concept where the senior acquisition general officer in that region would really start looking at people's needs and assigning them jobs based on what's needed instead of having HRC and USAASC making assignments from Washington, DC. Again, this process is going to take a while to fully implement because the personnel system must have some things put in place to allow regional assignments — an assignment

within a region versus an assignment to a specific job. This system will facilitate better mentoring between our senior leaders and junior officers, and ensure that when junior officers come out of their respective regions, they have the tools, skills and experiences to compete for product management positions down the road.

So overall, from life-cycle management to both military and civilian careers, these are issues that I've focused on, and I hope that these ideas have made, or will make, a positive difference in the professional development of the AL&T Workforce — present and future.

AL&T: As you look to the future of Army acquisition programs, what challenges do you envision for the future of Army acquisition transformation?

Yakovac: Army acquisition has changed dramatically since I first came into acquisition as a practice. We used to talk about the Big Five — the Abrams, Bradley, Multiple Launch Rocket System [MLRS], Apache and Black Hawk. The fact is, the Big Five programs were all managed well, but were managed in such a way that not until they were fielded, and through tactics, techniques and procedures [TTPs], were their complementary capabilities really brought to bear. For example, Abrams and Bradley were two programs being developed at the same time. But in

terms of requirements and testing, looking at how the Army acquisition community was providing an integrated product and maximizing the capabilities between those two systems wasn't the way we did business back then. Today, it's absolutely critical that as we develop systems, we think about

how they must work together and what the integration challenges are. How do we ensure — not through TTPs but actually by design — that these systems will work together when a warfighter gets them? Two things are causing us to do this. First, because of the sheer cost of our equipment today, we must maximize the capabilities of that equipment over its entire life cycle. We can't afford to have individual systems out there with duplicative capabilities. In some cases we must have duplication, and I understand that. But where we can, we want to take advantage of the capabilities and integrate them across the entire battlespace. So that's one challenge that we must continue to work in the future.

Second, is the nature of the battlespace itself. When I came into the Army, it was divided into branches — infantry,

armor, artillery and so on. That pretty much outlined the way the Army operated. The armor, infantry, artillery and signal branches all did specific tasks. But today, for each branch to really be able to perform their specific

The skill sets, education and challenges today, I believe, are an order of magnitude greater than in the past. And unless we're committed to looking for ways to meet 21st-century challenges, by understanding that continuing education is absolutely critical to attaining an acquisition workforce that takes advantage of the skills of both military and civilian personnel — we will fail.

Yakovac pointed out that the Stryker vehicle is a perfect example of how the PM community integrated capabilities across the workforce from requirements generation through actual fielding to provide a highly mobile and versatile armored vehicle capable of providing full-spectrum operational support through its numerous combat and command and control configurations. Here, a Soldier fires a 120mm Mortar Cannon from his Stryker Mortar Carrier vehicle during combat operations outside Mosul, Iraq, on June 1, 2006. (USAF photo by TSGT Jeremy Lock, 1st Combat Camera Squadron.)



tasks, there's a blur of what artillerymen, infantrymen and armormen are supposed to do. Technology has allowed us to provide different capabilities than we've ever provided before, and they are no longer branch-specific. They're just capabilities. Therefore, if you look at what we're trying to provide in the future for the battlespace, the complexity of an integrated capability with enhanced capacity, from requirements through development through testing through fielding is a real challenge. But in most cases, our large project shops will be reliant upon and will have to work with each other. They can no longer say, "Look, I have a product and I control everything

I need to build that product. I don't need to interface with any other PEOs, PMs, or even the Air Force or Marines." Today, when you talk about our products that are really in the battlespace, it is now an integrated battlespace. So we must do a better job of working together from the beginning — from requirements generation all the way through fielding. The Stryker program is an example of various PMs — not just PM Stryker — coming together to provide an integrated capability. Networking is absolutely a piece that needs everyone's attention and they must understand it. So again, we have a capability that delivers what the warfighter needs, but now it has been

engineered to be both affordable and sustainable in the long run. It's a community-wide challenge, and it's one that we must continue to address. We have a professional workforce that knows how to accomplish that.

As I see it, our challenge for the 21st century is integration of complex solutions across the battlespace and how we as acquisition professionals work to provide synergy across all of our capabilities. Additionally, we've been challenged to provide Joint capability and work with our other acquisition professionals in DOD, the Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and other government and non-government agencies.

AL&T: Do you have any advice to offer the AL&T community?

Yakovac: We cannot afford to be complacent or to sit back and think that since we've been successful at providing capabilities in the past that doing the same thing that we did back then will allow us continued success in the future. We must challenge ourselves to maintain and be responsible for all skill sets through continuing education, developmental training assignments and mentoring. In this highly competitive, resource-constrained environment, we cannot do things the same way that we used to. The skill sets, education and challenges today, I believe, are an order of magnitude greater than in the past. And unless we're committed to looking for ways to meet 21st-century challenges, by understanding that continuing education is absolutely critical to attaining an acquisition workforce that takes advantage of the skills of both military and civilian personnel — we will fail. We owe it to our Soldiers, Sailors and Marines who are looking to us for capability, as well as to taxpayers and this Nation, to provide the best we can with the resources we are given.

AL&T: As you prepare to pass the torch to future leaders, what do you perceive their challenges to be?

Yakovac: Future leaders must continue to recognize that working

together in an integrated fashion is the only way that we'll be successful. We've talked about this a lot in different conferences throughout the year. When we're implementing new programs, we must instill integration in the way we do business. If you look at Future Combat Systems [FCS] — the next step in terms

In the last three years, we have worked on rapid programs with urgency statements to provide added capability that has really helped Soldiers — from up-armoring vehicles to providing communications capabilities. We've provided a tremendous amount of capability rapidly when our Soldiers have said "I need this."

of management challenges from Stryker — it really takes an entire PEO world working together, along with the Air Force and Navy, to provide the capability that the requirements doctrine has asked for. So again it's an approach — none of us are islands unto ourselves. In most cases, we all rely on each other and must work together to provide a 21st-century Army.

AL&T: As you look toward retirement, what do you consider your greatest accomplishments over your career and what have been your biggest challenges?

Yakovac: I don't think that I, individually, have accomplished anything. It's more about what we, the acquisition community, have done collectively, in spite of the big

acquisition process that in many cases we don't control, including dollars. We've done a tremendous job of adapting to requirements and to accomplishing what we've been asked to do. We've provided a great capability from big programs of record, such as Stryker or FCS. In the last three years, we have worked on rapid programs with urgency statements to provide added capability that has really helped

Soldiers — from up-armoring vehicles to providing communications capabilities. We've provided a tremendous amount of capability rapidly when our Soldiers have said "I need this." The equipment we have produced has been safe, reliable, sustainable and more lethal than ever before. With the support of our strategic partners such as the U.S. Army Test and Evaluation Command [ATEC], we continue to focus on the big programs we have in our budget, such as Stryker, FCS and the restructuring of aviation. Tremendous tasks have been accomplished in the last three years, and we continue to add to that tremendous record. So I look not at my ability, but at the ability of the people who work for me to understand what's required and to go out and do it. At the end of the day, as acquisition, we have the toughest job. Everybody knows how to do it better, whether it's people within the Army, people outside the Army or people over on Capitol Hill. We must always accept that if you really want people to appreciate what we do, we must take our own pride in how we do it and know that, in spite of all of the roadblocks the acquisition system puts in front of us, we do a damn good job in providing capability. Again, it's not about any one person, it's about us collectively working together.

CYNTHIA D. HERMES is Executive Editor of *Army AL&T* Magazine. In her 26 years of government service, she has worked as an editor for both the Army and Navy. Prior to coming to *Army AL&T* Magazine, Hermes edited U.S. Navy and Marine Corps aircraft procedural and tactical manuals at the Navy Tactical Support Activity (NTSA). She was also a program analyst at NTSA, managing file conversion of these manuals from print to CD-ROM and overseeing mass CD-ROM production and distribution.